

# Exhibit A

# THE 9/11 COMMISSION REPORT

## THE 9/11 COMMISSION REPORT

Between 6:45 and 7:40, Atta and Omari, along with Satam al Suqami, Wail al Shehri, and Waleed al Shehri, checked in and boarded American Airlines Flight 11, bound for Los Angeles. The flight was scheduled to depart at 7:45.<sup>4</sup>

In another Logan terminal, Shehhi, joined by Fayez Banihammad, Mohand al Shehri, Ahmed al Ghamdi, and Hamza al Ghamdi, checked in for United Airlines Flight 175, also bound for Los Angeles. A couple of Shehhi's colleagues were obviously unused to travel; according to the United ticket agent, they had trouble understanding the standard security questions, and she had to go over them slowly until they gave the routine, reassuring answers.<sup>5</sup> Their flight was scheduled to depart at 8:00.

The security checkpoints through which passengers, including Atta and his colleagues, gained access to the American 11 gate were operated by Globe Security under a contract with American Airlines. In a different terminal, the single checkpoint through which passengers for United 175 passed was controlled by United Airlines, which had contracted with Huntleigh USA to perform the screening.<sup>6</sup>

In passing through these checkpoints, each of the hijackers would have been screened by a walk-through metal detector calibrated to detect items with at least the metal content of a .22-caliber handgun. Anyone who might have set off that detector would have been screened with a hand wand—a procedure requiring the screener to identify the metal item or items that caused the alarm. In addition, an X-ray machine would have screened the hijackers' carry-on belongings. The screening was in place to identify and confiscate weapons and other items prohibited from being carried onto a commercial flight.<sup>7</sup> None of the checkpoint supervisors recalled the hijackers or reported anything suspicious regarding their screening.<sup>8</sup>

While Atta had been selected by CAPPS in Portland, three members of his hijacking team—Suqami, Wail al Shehri, and Waleed al Shehri—were selected in Boston. Their selection affected only the handling of their checked bags, not their screening at the checkpoint. All five men cleared the checkpoint and made their way to the gate for American 11. Atta, Omari, and Suqami took their seats in business class (seats 8D, 8G, and 10B, respectively). The Shehri brothers had adjacent seats in row 2 (Wail in 2A, Waleed in 2B), in the first-class cabin. They boarded American 11 between 7:31 and 7:40. The aircraft pushed back from the gate at 7:40.<sup>9</sup>

Shehhi and his team, none of whom had been selected by CAPPS, boarded United 175 between 7:23 and 7:28 (Banihammad in 2A, Shehri in 2B, Shehhi in 6C, Hamza al Ghamdi in 9C, and Ahmed al Ghamdi in 9D). Their aircraft pushed back from the gate just before 8:00.<sup>10</sup>

**Washington Dulles: American 77.** Hundreds of miles southwest of Boston, at Dulles International Airport in the Virginia suburbs of Washington, D.C., five more men were preparing to take their early morning flight. At 7:15, a pair

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Reports from two flight attendants in the coach cabin, Betty Ong and Madeline “Amy” Sweeney, tell us most of what we know about how the hijacking happened. As it began, some of the hijackers—most likely Wail al Shehri and Waleed al Shehri, who were seated in row 2 in first class—stabbed the two unarmed flight attendants who would have been preparing for cabin service.<sup>25</sup>

We do not know exactly how the hijackers gained access to the cockpit; FAA rules required that the doors remain closed and locked during flight. Ong speculated that they had “jammed their way” in. Perhaps the terrorists stabbed the flight attendants to get a cockpit key, to force one of them to open the cockpit door, or to lure the captain or first officer out of the cockpit. Or the flight attendants may just have been in their way.<sup>26</sup>

At the same time or shortly thereafter, Atta—the only terrorist on board trained to fly a jet—would have moved to the cockpit from his business-class seat, possibly accompanied by Omari. As this was happening, passenger Daniel Lewin, who was seated in the row just behind Atta and Omari, was stabbed by one of the hijackers—probably Satam al Suqami, who was seated directly behind Lewin. Lewin had served four years as an officer in the Israeli military. He may have made an attempt to stop the hijackers in front of him, not realizing that another was sitting behind him.<sup>27</sup>

The hijackers quickly gained control and sprayed Mace, pepper spray, or some other irritant in the first-class cabin, in order to force the passengers and flight attendants toward the rear of the plane. They claimed they had a bomb.<sup>28</sup>

About five minutes after the hijacking began, Betty Ong contacted the American Airlines Southeastern Reservations Office in Cary, North Carolina, via an AT&T airphone to report an emergency aboard the flight. This was the first of several occasions on 9/11 when flight attendants took action outside the scope of their training, which emphasized that in a hijacking, they were to communicate with the cockpit crew. The emergency call lasted approximately 25 minutes, as Ong calmly and professionally relayed information about events taking place aboard the airplane to authorities on the ground.<sup>29</sup>

At 8:19, Ong reported: “The cockpit is not answering, somebody’s stabbed in business class—and I think there’s Mace—that we can’t breathe—I don’t know, I think we’re getting hijacked.” She then told of the stabbings of the two flight attendants.<sup>30</sup>

At 8:21, one of the American employees receiving Ong’s call in North Carolina, Nydia Gonzalez, alerted the American Airlines operations center in Fort Worth, Texas, reaching Craig Marquis, the manager on duty. Marquis soon realized this was an emergency and instructed the airline’s dispatcher responsible for the flight to contact the cockpit. At 8:23, the dispatcher tried unsuccessfully to contact the aircraft. Six minutes later, the air traffic control specialist in American’s operations center contacted the FAA’s Boston Air Traffic Control Center about the flight. The center was already aware of the problem.<sup>31</sup>

Because several passengers on United 93 described three hijackers on the plane, not four, some have wondered whether one of the hijackers had been able to use the cockpit jump seat from the outset of the flight. FAA rules allow use of this seat by documented and approved individuals, usually air carrier or FAA personnel. We have found no evidence indicating that one of the hijackers, or anyone else, sat there on this flight. All the hijackers had assigned seats in first class, and they seem to have used them. We believe it is more likely that Jarrah, the crucial pilot-trained member of their team, remained seated and inconspicuous until after the cockpit was seized; and once inside, he would not have been visible to the passengers.<sup>74</sup>

At 9:32, a hijacker, probably Jarrah, made or attempted to make the following announcement to the passengers of Flight 93: "Ladies and Gentlemen: Here the captain, please sit down keep remaining sitting. We have a bomb on board. So, sit." The flight data recorder (also recovered) indicates that Jarrah then instructed the plane's autopilot to turn the aircraft around and head east.<sup>75</sup>

The cockpit voice recorder data indicate that a woman, most likely a flight attendant, was being held captive in the cockpit. She struggled with one of the hijackers who killed or otherwise silenced her.<sup>76</sup>

Shortly thereafter, the passengers and flight crew began a series of calls from GTE airphones and cellular phones. These calls between family, friends, and colleagues took place until the end of the flight and provided those on the ground with firsthand accounts. They enabled the passengers to gain critical information, including the news that two aircraft had slammed into the World Trade Center.<sup>77</sup>

At 9:39, the FAA's Cleveland Air Route Traffic Control Center overheard a second announcement indicating that there was a bomb on board, that the plane was returning to the airport, and that they should remain seated.<sup>78</sup> While it apparently was not heard by the passengers, this announcement, like those on Flight 11 and Flight 77, was intended to deceive them. Jarrah, like Atta earlier, may have inadvertently broadcast the message because he did not know how to operate the radio and the intercom. To our knowledge none of them had ever flown an actual airliner before.

At least two callers from the flight reported that the hijackers knew that passengers were making calls but did not seem to care. It is quite possible Jarrah knew of the success of the assault on the World Trade Center. He could have learned of this from messages being sent by United Airlines to the cockpits of its transcontinental flights, including Flight 93, warning of cockpit intrusion and telling of the New York attacks. But even without them, he would certainly have understood that the attacks on the World Trade Center would already have unfolded, given Flight 93's tardy departure from Newark. If Jarrah did know that the passengers were making calls, it might not have occurred to him that they were certain to learn what had happened in New York, thereby defeating his attempts at deception.<sup>79</sup>



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The controller checked to see if American Airlines could establish communication with American 11. He became even more concerned as its route changed, moving into another sector's airspace. Controllers immediately began to move aircraft out of its path, and asked other aircraft in the vicinity to look for American 11.<sup>108</sup>

At 8:24:38, the following transmission came from American 11:

**American 11:** We have some planes. Just stay quiet, and you'll be okay. We are returning to the airport.

The controller only heard something unintelligible; he did not hear the specific words "we have some planes." The next transmission came seconds later:

**American 11:** Nobody move. Everything will be okay. If you try to make any moves, you'll endanger yourself and the airplane. Just stay quiet.<sup>109</sup>

The controller told us that he then knew it was a hijacking. He alerted his supervisor, who assigned another controller to assist him. He redoubled his efforts to ascertain the flight's altitude. Because the controller didn't understand the initial transmission, the manager of Boston Center instructed his quality assurance specialist to "pull the tape" of the radio transmission, listen to it closely, and report back.<sup>110</sup>

Between 8:25 and 8:32, in accordance with the FAA protocol, Boston Center managers started notifying their chain of command that American 11 had been hijacked. At 8:28, Boston Center called the Command Center in Herndon to advise that it believed American 11 had been hijacked and was heading toward New York Center's airspace.

By this time, American 11 had taken a dramatic turn to the south. At 8:32, the Command Center passed word of a possible hijacking to the Operations Center at FAA headquarters. The duty officer replied that security personnel at headquarters had just begun discussing the apparent hijack on a conference call with the New England regional office. FAA headquarters began to follow the hijack protocol but did not contact the NMCC to request a fighter escort.<sup>111</sup>

The Herndon Command Center immediately established a teleconference between Boston, New York, and Cleveland Centers so that Boston Center could help the others understand what was happening.<sup>112</sup>

At 8:34, the Boston Center controller received a third transmission from American 11:

**American 11:** Nobody move please. We are going back to the airport. Don't try to make any stupid moves.<sup>113</sup>

rorists (some 60,000 before 9/11) until he heard it mentioned during the Commission's January 26, 2004, public hearing. The FAA had access to some TIPOFF data, but apparently found it too difficult to use.<sup>54</sup>

The second part of prescreening called on the air carriers to implement an FAA-approved computerized algorithm (known as CAPPs, for Computer Assisted Passenger Prescreening System) designed to identify passengers whose profile suggested they might pose more than a minimal risk to aircraft. Although the algorithm included hijacker profile data, at that time only passengers checking bags were eligible to be selected by CAPPs for additional scrutiny. Selection entailed only having one's checked baggage screened for explosives or held off the airplane until one had boarded. Primarily because of concern regarding potential discrimination and the impact on passenger throughput, "selectees" were no longer required to undergo extraordinary screening of their carry-on baggage as had been the case before the system was computerized in 1997.<sup>55</sup> This policy change also reflected the perception that nonsuicide sabotage was the primary threat to civil aviation.

Checkpoint screening was considered the most important and obvious layer of security. Walk-through metal detectors and X-ray machines operated by trained screeners were employed to stop prohibited items. Numerous government reports indicated that checkpoints performed poorly, often failing to detect even obvious FAA test items. Many deadly and dangerous items did not set off metal detectors, or were hard to distinguish in an X-ray machine from innocent everyday items.<sup>56</sup>

While FAA rules did not expressly prohibit knives with blades under 4 inches long, the airlines' checkpoint operations guide (which was developed in cooperation with the FAA), explicitly permitted them. The FAA's basis for this policy was (1) the agency did not consider such items to be menacing, (2) most local laws did not prohibit individuals from carrying such knives, and (3) such knives would have been difficult to detect unless the sensitivity of metal detectors had been greatly increased. A proposal to ban knives altogether in 1993 had been rejected because small cutting implements were difficult to detect and the number of innocent "alarms" would have increased significantly, exacerbating congestion problems at checkpoints.<sup>57</sup>

Several years prior to 9/11, an FAA requirement for screeners to conduct "continuous" and "random" hand searches of carry-on luggage at checkpoints had been replaced by explosive trace detection or had simply become ignored by the air carriers. Therefore, secondary screening of individuals and their carry-on bags to identify weapons (other than bombs) was nonexistent, except for passengers who triggered the metal detectors. Even when small knives were detected by secondary screening, they were usually returned to the traveler. Reportedly, the 9/11 hijackers were instructed to use items that would be undetectable by airport checkpoints.<sup>58</sup>

In the pre-9/11 security system, the air carriers played a major role. As the

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Inspector General of the Department of Transportation told us, there were great pressures from the air carriers to control security costs and to “limit the impact of security requirements on aviation operations, so that the industry could concentrate on its primary mission of moving passengers and aircraft. . . . [T]hose counterpressures in turn manifested themselves as significant weaknesses in security.” A longtime FAA security official described the air carriers’ approach to security regulation as “decry, deny and delay” and told us that while “the air carriers had seen the enlightened hand of self-interest with respect to safety, they hadn’t seen it in the security arena.”<sup>59</sup>

The final layer, security on board commercial aircraft, was not designed to counter suicide hijackings. The FAA-approved “Common Strategy” had been elaborated over decades of experience with scores of hijackings, beginning in the 1960s. It taught flight crews that the best way to deal with hijackers was to accommodate their demands, get the plane to land safely, and then let law enforcement or the military handle the situation. According to the FAA, the record had shown that the longer a hijacking persisted, the more likely it was to end peacefully. The strategy operated on the fundamental assumption that hijackers issue negotiable demands (most often for asylum or the release of prisoners) and that, as one FAA official put it, “suicide wasn’t in the game plan” of hijackers. FAA training material provided no guidance for flight crews should violence occur.<sup>60</sup>

This prevailing Common Strategy of cooperation and nonconfrontation meant that even a hardened cockpit door would have made little difference in a hijacking. As the chairman of the Security Committee of the Air Line Pilots Association observed when proposals were made in early 2001 to install reinforced cockpit doors in commercial aircraft, “Even if you make a vault out of the door, if they have a noose around my flight attendant’s neck, I’m going to open the door.” Prior to 9/11, FAA regulations mandated that cockpit doors permit ready access into and out of the cockpit in the event of an emergency. Even so, rules implemented in the 1960s required air crews to keep the cockpit door closed and locked in flight. This requirement was not always observed or vigorously enforced.<sup>61</sup>

As for law enforcement, there were only 33 armed and trained federal air marshals as of 9/11. They were not deployed on U.S. domestic flights, except when in transit to provide security on international departures. This policy reflected the FAA’s view that domestic hijacking was in check—a view held confidently as no terrorist had hijacked a U.S. commercial aircraft anywhere in the world since 1986.<sup>62</sup>

In the absence of any recent aviation security incident and without “specific and credible” evidence of a plot directed at civil aviation, the FAA’s leadership focused elsewhere, including on operational concerns and the ever-present issue of safety. FAA Administrator Garvey recalled that “every day in 2001 was like the day before Thanksgiving.” Heeding calls for improved air



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Ladin reportedly instructed him to case the Port of Aden, on the southern coast, instead.<sup>30</sup> The eventual result was an attempted attack on the USS *The Sullivans* in January 2000 and the successful attack, in October 2000, on the USS *Cole*.

Nashiri's success brought him instant status within al Qaeda. He later was recognized as the chief of al Qaeda operations in and around the Arabian Peninsula. While Nashiri continued to consult Bin Ladin on the planning of subsequent terrorist projects, he retained discretion in selecting operatives and devising attacks. In the two years between the *Cole* bombing and Nashiri's capture, he would supervise several more proposed operations for al Qaeda. The October 6, 2002, bombing of the French tanker *Limburg* in the Gulf of Aden also was Nashiri's handiwork. Although Bin Ladin urged Nashiri to continue plotting strikes against U.S. interests in the Persian Gulf, Nashiri maintains that he actually delayed one of these projects because of security concerns.<sup>31</sup> Those concerns, it seems, were well placed, as Nashiri's November 2002 capture in the United Arab Emirates finally ended his career as a terrorist.

## 5.2 THE "PLANES OPERATION"

According to KSM, he started to think about attacking the United States after Yousef returned to Pakistan following the 1993 World Trade Center bombing. Like Yousef, KSM reasoned he could best influence U.S. policy by targeting the country's economy. KSM and Yousef reportedly brainstormed together about what drove the U.S. economy. New York, which KSM considered the economic capital of the United States, therefore became the primary target. For similar reasons, California also became a target for KSM.<sup>32</sup>

KSM claims that the earlier bombing of the World Trade Center taught him that bombs and explosives could be problematic, and that he needed to graduate to a more novel form of attack. He maintains that he and Yousef began thinking about using aircraft as weapons while working on the Manila air/Bojinka plot, and speculated about striking the World Trade Center and CIA headquarters as early as 1995.<sup>33</sup>

Certainly KSM was not alone in contemplating new kinds of terrorist operations. A study reportedly conducted by Atef, while he and Bin Ladin were still in Sudan, concluded that traditional terrorist hijacking operations did not fit the needs of al Qaeda, because such hijackings were used to negotiate the release of prisoners rather than to inflict mass casualties. The study is said to have considered the feasibility of hijacking planes and blowing them up in flight, paralleling the Bojinka concept. Such a study, if it actually existed, yields significant insight into the thinking of al Qaeda's leaders: (1) they rejected hijackings aimed at gaining the release of imprisoned comrades as too complex, because al Qaeda had no friendly countries in which to land a plane and

then negotiate; (2) they considered the bombing of commercial flights in midair—as carried out against Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland—a promising means to inflict massive casualties; and (3) they did not yet consider using hijacked aircraft as weapons against other targets.<sup>34</sup>

KSM has insisted to his interrogators that he always contemplated hijacking and crashing large commercial aircraft. Indeed, KSM describes a grandiose original plan: a total of ten aircraft to be hijacked, nine of which would crash into targets on both coasts—they included those eventually hit on September 11 plus CIA and FBI headquarters, nuclear power plants, and the tallest buildings in California and the state of Washington. KSM himself was to land the tenth plane at a U.S. airport and, after killing all adult male passengers on board and alerting the media, deliver a speech excoriating U.S. support for Israel, the Philippines, and repressive governments in the Arab world. Beyond KSM's rationalizations about targeting the U.S. economy, this vision gives a better glimpse of his true ambitions. This is theater, a spectacle of destruction with KSM as the self-cast star—the superterrorist.<sup>35</sup>

KSM concedes that this proposal received a lukewarm response from al Qaeda leaders skeptical of its scale and complexity. Although Bin Ladin listened to KSM's proposal, he was not convinced that it was practical. As mentioned earlier, Bin Ladin was receiving numerous ideas for potential operations—KSM's proposal to attack U.S. targets with commercial airplanes was only one of many.<sup>36</sup>

KSM presents himself as an entrepreneur seeking venture capital and people. He simply wanted al Qaeda to supply the money and operatives needed for the attack while retaining his independence. It is easy to question such a statement. Money is one thing; supplying a cadre of trained operatives willing to die is much more. Thus, although KSM contends he would have been just as likely to consider working with any comparable terrorist organization, he gives no indication of what other groups he thought could supply such exceptional commodities.<sup>37</sup>

KSM acknowledges formally joining al Qaeda, in late 1998 or 1999, and states that soon afterward, Bin Ladin also made the decision to support his proposal to attack the United States using commercial airplanes as weapons. Though KSM speculates about how Bin Ladin came to share his preoccupation with attacking America, Bin Ladin in fact had long been an opponent of the United States. KSM thinks that Atef may have persuaded Bin Ladin to approve this specific proposal. Atef's role in the entire operation is unquestionably very significant but tends to fade into the background, in part because Atef himself is not available to describe it. He was killed in November 2001 by an American air strike in Afghanistan.<sup>38</sup>

Bin Ladin summoned KSM to Kandahar in March or April 1999 to tell him that al Qaeda would support his proposal. The plot was now referred to within al Qaeda as the “planes operation.”<sup>39</sup>

### The Plan Evolves

Bin Ladin reportedly discussed the planes operation with KSM and Atef in a series of meetings in the spring of 1999 at the al Matar complex near Kandahar. KSM's original concept of using one of the hijacked planes to make a media statement was scrapped, but Bin Ladin considered the basic idea feasible. Bin Ladin, Atef, and KSM developed an initial list of targets. These included the White House, the U.S. Capitol, the Pentagon, and the World Trade Center. According to KSM, Bin Ladin wanted to destroy the White House and the Pentagon, KSM wanted to strike the World Trade Center, and all of them wanted to hit the Capitol. No one else was involved in the initial selection of targets.<sup>40</sup>

Bin Ladin also soon selected four individuals to serve as suicide operatives: Khalid al Mihdhar, Nawaf al Hazmi, Khallad, and Abu Bara al Yemeni. During the al Matar meetings, Bin Ladin told KSM that Mihdhar and Hazmi were so eager to participate in an operation against the United States that they had already obtained U.S. visas. KSM states that they had done so on their own after the suicide of their friend Azzam (Nashiri's cousin) in carrying out the Nairobi bombing. KSM had not met them. His only guidance from Bin Ladin was that the two should eventually go to the United States for pilot training.<sup>41</sup>

Hazmi and Mihdhar were Saudi nationals, born in Mecca. Like the others in this initial group of selectees, they were already experienced mujahideen. They had traveled together to fight in Bosnia in a group that journeyed to the Balkans in 1995. By the time Hazmi and Mihdhar were assigned to the planes operation in early 1999, they had visited Afghanistan on several occasions.<sup>42</sup>

Khallad was another veteran mujahid, like much of his family. His father had been expelled from Yemen because of his extremist views. Khallad had grown up in Saudi Arabia, where his father knew Bin Ladin, Abdullah Azzam, and Omar Abdel Rahman (the "Blind Sheikh"). Khallad departed for Afghanistan in 1994 at the age of 15. Three years later, he lost his lower right leg in a battle with the Northern Alliance, a battle in which one of his brothers died. After this experience, he pledged allegiance to Bin Ladin—whom he had first met as a child in Jeddah—and volunteered to become a suicide operative.<sup>43</sup>

When Khallad applied for a U.S. visa, however, his application was denied. Earlier in 1999, Bin Ladin had sent Khallad to Yemen to help Nashiri obtain explosives for the planned ship-bombing and to obtain a visa to visit the United States, so that he could participate in an operation there. Khallad applied under another name, using the cover story that he would be visiting a medical clinic to obtain a new prosthesis for his leg. Another al Qaeda operative gave Khallad the name of a person living in the United States whom Khallad could use as a point of contact on a visa application. Khallad contacted this individual to help him get an appointment at a U.S. clinic. While Khallad was waiting for the letter from the clinic confirming the appointment, however, he was arrested by Yemeni authorities. The arrest resulted from mistaken identity: Khallad was driving the car of another conspirator in the ship-bombing plot who was wanted by the Yemeni authorities.<sup>44</sup>



Khallad was released sometime during the summer of 1999, after his father and Bin Ladin intervened on his behalf. Khallad learned later that the al Qaeda leader, apparently concerned that Khallad might reveal Nashiri's operation while under interrogation, had contacted a Yemeni official to demand Khallad's release, suggesting that Bin Ladin would not confront the Yemenis if they did not confront him. This account has been corroborated by others. Giving up on acquiring a U.S. visa and concerned that the United States might learn of his ties to al Qaeda, Khallad returned to Afghanistan.<sup>45</sup>

Travel issues thus played a part in al Qaeda's operational planning from the very start. During the spring and summer of 1999, KSM realized that Khallad and Abu Bara, both of whom were Yemenis, would not be able to obtain U.S. visas as easily as Saudi operatives like Mihdhar and Hazmi. Although Khallad had been unable to acquire a U.S. visa, KSM still wanted him and Abu Bara, as well as another Yemeni operative from Bin Ladin's security detail, to participate in the planes operation. Yet because individuals with Saudi passports could travel much more easily than Yemenis, particularly to the United States, there were fewer martyrdom opportunities for Yemenis. To overcome this problem, KSM decided to split the planes operation into two components.<sup>46</sup>

The first part of the planes operation—crashing hijacked aircraft into U.S. targets—would remain as planned, with Mihdhar and Hazmi playing key roles. The second part, however, would now embrace the idea of using suicide operatives to blow up planes, a refinement of KSM's old Manila air plot. The operatives would hijack U.S.-flagged commercial planes flying Pacific routes across East Asia and destroy them in midair, possibly with shoe bombs, instead of flying them into targets. (An alternate scenario apparently involved flying planes into U.S. targets in Japan, Singapore, or Korea.) This part of the operation has been confirmed by Khallad, who said that they contemplated hijacking several planes, probably originating in Thailand, South Korea, Hong Kong, or Malaysia, and using Yemenis who would not need pilot training because they would simply down the planes. All the planes hijacked in the United States and East Asia were to be crashed or exploded at about the same time to maximize the attack's psychological impact.<sup>47</sup>

### **Training and Deployment to Kuala Lumpur**

In the fall of 1999, the four operatives selected by Bin Ladin for the planes operation were chosen to attend an elite training course at al Qaeda's Mes Aynak camp in Afghanistan. Bin Ladin personally selected the veteran fighters who received this training, and several of them were destined for important operations. One example is Ibrahim al Thawar, or Nibras, who would participate in the October 12, 2000, suicide attack on the USS *Cole*. According to KSM, this training was not given specifically in preparation for the planes operation or any other particular al Qaeda venture. Although KSM claims not to have been involved with the training or to have met with the future 9/11 hijackers at Mes



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Aynak, he says he did visit the camp while traveling from Kandahar to Kabul with Bin Ladin and others.<sup>48</sup>

The Mes Aynak training camp was located in an abandoned Russian copper mine near Kabul. The camp opened in 1999, after the United States had destroyed the training camp near Khowst with cruise missiles in August 1998, and before the Taliban granted al Qaeda permission to open the al Faruq camp in Kandahar. Thus, for a brief period in 1999, Mes Aynak was the only al Qaeda camp operating in Afghanistan. It offered a full range of instruction, including an advanced commando course taught by senior al Qaeda member Sayf al Adl. Bin Ladin paid particular attention to the 1999 training session. When Salah al Din, the trainer for the session, complained about the number of trainees and said that no more than 20 could be handled at once, Bin Ladin insisted that everyone he had selected receive the training.<sup>49</sup>

The special training session at Mes Aynak was rigorous and spared no expense. The course focused on physical fitness, firearms, close quarters combat, shooting from a motorcycle, and night operations. Although the subjects taught differed little from those offered at other camps, the course placed extraordinary physical and mental demands on its participants, who received the best food and other amenities to enhance their strength and morale.<sup>50</sup>

Upon completing the advanced training at Mes Aynak, Hazmi, Khallad, and Abu Bara went to Karachi, Pakistan. There KSM instructed them on Western culture and travel. Much of his activity in mid-1999 had revolved around the collection of training and informational materials for the participants in the planes operation. For instance, he collected Western aviation magazines; telephone directories for American cities such as San Diego and Long Beach, California; brochures for schools; and airline timetables, and he conducted Internet searches on U.S. flight schools. He also purchased flight simulator software and a few movies depicting hijackings. To house his students, KSM rented a safehouse in Karachi with money provided by Bin Ladin.<sup>51</sup>

In early December 1999, Khallad and Abu Bara arrived in Karachi. Hazmi joined them there a few days later. On his way to Karachi, Hazmi spent a night in Quetta at a safehouse where, according to KSM, an Egyptian named Mohamed Atta simultaneously stayed on his way to Afghanistan for jihad training.<sup>52</sup>

Mihdhar did not attend the training in Karachi with the others. KSM says that he never met with Mihdhar in 1999 but assumed that Bin Ladin and Atef had briefed Mihdhar on the planes operation and had excused him from the Karachi training.<sup>53</sup>

The course in Karachi apparently lasted about one or two weeks. According to KSM, he taught the three operatives basic English words and phrases. He showed them how to read phone books, interpret airline timetables, use the Internet, use code words in communications, make travel reservations, and rent an apartment. Khallad adds that the training involved using flight simulator com-

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puter games, viewing movies that featured hijackings, and reading flight schedules to determine which flights would be in the air at the same time in different parts of the world. They used the game software to increase their familiarity with aircraft models and functions, and to highlight gaps in cabin security. While in Karachi, they also discussed how to case flights in Southeast Asia. KSM told them to watch the cabin doors at takeoff and landing, to observe whether the captain went to the lavatory during the flight, and to note whether the flight attendants brought food into the cockpit. KSM, Khallad, and Hazmi also visited travel agencies to learn the visa requirements for Asian countries.<sup>54</sup>

The four trainees traveled to Kuala Lumpur: Khallad, Abu Bara, and Hazmi came from Karachi; Mihdhar traveled from Yemen. As discussed in chapter 6, U.S. intelligence would analyze communications associated with Mihdhar, whom they identified during this travel, and Hazmi, whom they could have identified but did not.<sup>55</sup>

According to KSM, the four operatives were aware that they had volunteered for a suicide operation, either in the United States or in Asia. With different roles, they had different tasks. Hazmi and Mihdhar were sent to Kuala Lumpur before proceeding to their final destination—the United States. According to KSM, they were to use Yemeni documents to fly to Malaysia, then proceed to the United States using their Saudi passports to conceal their prior travels to and from Pakistan. KSM had doctored Hazmi's Saudi passport so it would appear as if Hazmi had traveled to Kuala Lumpur from Saudi Arabia via Dubai. Khallad and Abu Bara went to Kuala Lumpur to study airport security and conduct casing flights. According to Khallad, he and Abu Bara departed for Malaysia in mid-December 1999. Hazmi joined them about ten days later after briefly returning to Afghanistan to attend to some passport issues.<sup>56</sup>

Khallad had originally scheduled his trip in order to receive a new prosthesis at a Kuala Lumpur clinic called Endolite, and Bin Ladin suggested that he use the opportunity to case flights as well. According to Khallad, Malaysia was an ideal destination because its government did not require citizens of Saudi Arabia or other Gulf states to have a visa. Malaysian security was reputed to be lax when it came to Islamist jihadists. Also, other mujahideen wounded in combat had reportedly received treatment at the Endolite clinic and successfully concealed the origins of their injuries. Khallad said he got the money for the prosthesis from his father, Bin Ladin, and another al Qaeda colleague.<sup>57</sup>

According to Khallad, when he and Abu Bara arrived in Kuala Lumpur they contacted Hambali to let him know where they were staying, since he was to be kept informed of al Qaeda activities in Southeast Asia. Hambali picked up Khallad and Abu Bara and brought them to his home, enlisting the help of a colleague who spoke better Arabic. Hambali then took them to the clinic.<sup>58</sup>

On December 31, Khallad flew from Kuala Lumpur to Bangkok; the next day, he flew to Hong Kong aboard a U.S. airliner. He flew in first class, which he realized was a mistake because this seating assignment on that flight did not afford him a view of the cockpit. He claims to have done what he could to case



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the flight, testing security by carrying a box cutter in his toiletries kit onto the flight to Hong Kong. Khallad returned to Bangkok the following day. At the airport, the security officials searched his carry-on bag and even opened the toiletries kit, but just glanced at the contents and let him pass. On this flight, Khallad waited until most of the first-class passengers were dozing, then got up and removed the kit from his carry-on. None of the flight attendants took notice.<sup>59</sup>

After completing his casing mission, Khallad returned to Kuala Lumpur. Hazmi arrived in Kuala Lumpur soon thereafter and may even have stayed briefly with Khallad and Abu Bara at Endolite. Mihdhar arrived on January 5, probably one day after Hazmi. All four operatives stayed at the apartment of Yazid Sufaat, the Malaysian JI member who made his home available at Hambali's request. According to Khallad, he and Hazmi spoke about the possibility of hijacking planes and crashing them or holding passengers as hostages, but only speculatively. Khallad admits being aware at the time that Hazmi and Mihdhar were involved in an operation involving planes in the United States but denies knowing details of the plan.<sup>60</sup>

While in Kuala Lumpur, Khallad wanted to go to Singapore to meet Nibras and Fahd al Quso, two of the operatives in Nashiri's ship-bombing operation. An attempt to execute that plan by attacking the USS *The Sullivans* had failed just a few days earlier. Nibras and Quso were bringing Khallad money from Yemen, but were stopped in Bangkok because they lacked visas to continue on to Singapore. Also unable to enter Singapore, Khallad moved the meeting to Bangkok. Hazmi and Mihdhar decided to go there as well, reportedly because they thought it would enhance their cover as tourists to have passport stamps from a popular tourist destination such as Thailand. With Hambali's help, the three obtained tickets for a flight to Bangkok and left Kuala Lumpur together. Abu Bara did not have a visa permitting him to return to Pakistan, so he traveled to Yemen instead.<sup>61</sup>

In Bangkok, Khallad took Hazmi and Mihdhar to one hotel, then went to another hotel for his meeting on the maritime attack plan. Hazmi and Mihdhar soon moved to that same hotel, but Khallad insists that the two sets of operatives never met with each other or anyone else. After conferring with the ship-bombing operatives, Khallad returned to Karachi and then to Kandahar, where he reported on his casing mission to Bin Ladin.<sup>62</sup>

Bin Ladin canceled the East Asia part of the planes operation in the spring of 2000. He evidently decided it would be too difficult to coordinate this attack with the operation in the United States. As for Hazmi and Mihdhar, they had left Bangkok a few days before Khallad and arrived in Los Angeles on January 15, 2000.<sup>63</sup>

Meanwhile, the next group of al Qaeda operatives destined for the planes operation had just surfaced in Afghanistan. As Hazmi and Mihdhar were deploying from Asia to the United States, al Qaeda's leadership was recruiting and training four Western-educated men who had recently arrived in Kandahar. Though they hailed from four different countries—Egypt, the United Arab

Emirates, Lebanon, and Yemen—they had formed a close-knit group as students in Hamburg, Germany. The new recruits had come to Afghanistan aspiring to wage jihad in Chechnya. But al Qaeda quickly recognized their potential and enlisted them in its anti-U.S. jihad.

### 5.3 THE HAMBURG CONTINGENT

Although Bin Ladin, Atef, and KSM initially contemplated using established al Qaeda members to execute the planes operation, the late 1999 arrival in Kandahar of four aspiring jihadists from Germany suddenly presented a more attractive alternative. The Hamburg group shared the anti-U.S. fervor of the other candidates for the operation, but added the enormous advantages of fluency in English and familiarity with life in the West, based on years that each member of the group had spent living in Germany. Not surprisingly, Mohamed Atta, Ramzi Binalshibh, Marwan al Shehhi, and Ziad Jarrah would all become key players in the 9/11 conspiracy.

#### **Mohamed Atta**

Mohamed Atta was born on September 1, 1968, in Kafr el Sheikh, Egypt, to a middle-class family headed by his father, an attorney. After graduating from Cairo University with a degree in architectural engineering in 1990, Atta worked as an urban planner in Cairo for a couple of years. In the fall of 1991, he asked a German family he had met in Cairo to help him continue his education in Germany. They suggested he come to Hamburg and invited him to live with them there, at least initially. After completing a course in German, Atta traveled to Germany for the first time in July 1992. He resided briefly in Stuttgart and then, in the fall of 1992, moved to Hamburg to live with his host family. After enrolling at the University of Hamburg, he promptly transferred into the city engineering and planning course at the Technical University of Hamburg-Harburg, where he would remain registered as a student until the fall of 1999. He appears to have applied himself fairly seriously to his studies (at least in comparison to his jihadist friends) and actually received his degree shortly before traveling to Afghanistan. In school, Atta came across as very intelligent and reasonably pleasant, with an excellent command of the German language.<sup>64</sup>

When Atta arrived in Germany, he appeared religious, but not fanatically so. This would change, especially as his tendency to assert leadership became increasingly pronounced. According to Binalshibh, as early as 1995 Atta sought to organize a Muslim student association in Hamburg. In the fall of 1997, he joined a working group at the Quds mosque in Hamburg, a group designed to bridge the gap between Muslims and Christians. Atta proved a poor bridge, however, because of his abrasive and increasingly dogmatic personality. But



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among those who shared his beliefs, Atta stood out as a decisionmaker. Atta's friends during this period remember him as charismatic, intelligent, and persuasive, albeit intolerant of dissent.<sup>65</sup>

In his interactions with other students, Atta voiced virulently anti-Semitic and anti-American opinions, ranging from condemnations of what he described as a global Jewish movement centered in New York City that supposedly controlled the financial world and the media, to polemics against governments of the Arab world. To him, Saddam Hussein was an American stooge set up to give Washington an excuse to intervene in the Middle East. Within his circle, Atta advocated violent jihad. He reportedly asked one individual close to the group if he was "ready to fight for [his] belief" and dismissed him as too weak for jihad when the person declined. On a visit home to Egypt in 1998, Atta met one of his college friends. According to this friend, Atta had changed a great deal, had grown a beard, and had "obviously adopted fundamentalism" by that time.<sup>66</sup>

### **Ramzi Binalshibh**

Ramzi Binalshibh was born on May 1, 1972, in Ghayl Bawazir, Yemen. There does not seem to be anything remarkable about his family or early background. A friend who knew Binalshibh in Yemen remembers him as "religious, but not too religious." From 1987 to 1995, Binalshibh worked as a clerk for the International Bank of Yemen. He first attempted to leave Yemen in 1995, when he applied for a U.S. visa. After his application was rejected, he went to Germany and applied for asylum under the name Ramzi Omar, claiming to be a Sudanese citizen seeking asylum. While his asylum petition was pending, Binalshibh lived in Hamburg and associated with individuals from several mosques there. In 1997, after his asylum application was denied, Binalshibh went home to Yemen but returned to Germany shortly thereafter under his true name, this time registering as a student in Hamburg. Binalshibh continually had academic problems, failing tests and cutting classes; he was expelled from one school in September 1998.<sup>67</sup>

According to Binalshibh, he and Atta first met at a mosque in Hamburg in 1995. The two men became close friends and became identified with their shared extremist outlook. Like Atta, by the late 1990s Binalshibh was decrying what he perceived to be a "Jewish world conspiracy." He proclaimed that the highest duty of every Muslim was to pursue jihad, and that the highest honor was to die during the jihad. Despite his rhetoric, however, Binalshibh presented a more amiable figure than the austere Atta, and was known within the community as being sociable, extroverted, polite, and adventuresome.<sup>68</sup>

In 1998, Binalshibh and Atta began sharing an apartment in the Harburg section of Hamburg, together with a young student from the United Arab Emirates named Marwan al Shehhi.<sup>69</sup>